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SUBJECT: (C) OMAN NAMES MEMBERS OF HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION; EMBASSY
ASSISTANCE SOUGHT

REF: A. 08 MUSCAT 795; B. 08 MUSCAT 838

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Schmierer, Ambassador, Department of State,
Embassy Muscat; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Oman named the members of its Human Rights Commission on January 24, at last providing substance to the November 2008 Royal Decree establishing the commission. Although there has been some criticism of the members selected, the list contains many known Embassy contacts who should prove to be effective in this group. Initial interactions with members have been positive, and the individuals are extremely excited about participating in the commission. The commission had its first meeting one week after being named, at which it scheduled a second meeting to take place only a week later. By objective standards, the government-appointed body cannot be deemed independent. However, the structure of the HRC allows for the possibility that it could operate without government interference. Within Oman, where people are accustomed to pervasive government involvement in society, the absence of overt government control and the commission's apparent ability to develop its own agenda portends a measure of independence. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On January 24, the Sultan issued Royal Decree 10/2010 appointing the chairman and members of the Human Rights Commission (HRC). The commission was originally formed by Royal Decree 124/2008 issued November 15, 2008 (Ref A) with the following responsibilities (Ref B):

- Pursuing the protection of human rights and freedoms in Oman in accordance with Omani law and international conventions and treaties;
- Monitoring remarks by foreign governments, international organizations, and NGOs in the area of human rights in Oman in order to verify and respond to such remarks;
- Consulting with concerned authorities regarding human rights and freedoms and contributing to the drafting of reports on these issues;
- Monitoring any violations or infringements related to human rights and assisting in resolving them; and
- Proposing an annual plan which includes national mechanisms necessary to spread "a human rights culture," as well as referring the plan to the Council of Ministers for approval and ensuring its proper implementation.

Members of the committee are:

- Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Mas'ud al Riyami, Chairman; member of the Majlis al-Dawla
- Ambassador Ali bin Salim bin Mas'ud al Ma'mari, Vice Chairman;

Chief of International Affairs Department, MFA

- Dr. Rasheed bin al-Safi bin Khamis al Haribi, member of the Majlis al-Shura
- Hussain bin Jawad bin Muhammad Abdulrasal; Chairman W.J. Towell Corporation
- Saoud bin Ali bin Abdullah al Jabri; Chairman General Federation of Oman Trade Unions
- Dr. Rashid bin Hamad bin Humaid al Bulushi; Assistant Dean, School of Law, Sultan Qaboos University
- Jihan bint Abdullah bin Muhammad al Lamki; Omani Journalists Association; Host of popular Oman TV talk show
- Jihad bin Abdullah bin Muhammad al Tai, well-known lawyer, a famous Omani political scholar
- Dina bint Hamza bin Abdullah al Asfur; Director of Nutrition, Ministry of Health, head of a volunteer group there
- Shaikh Muhanna bin Salih bin Sa'ud al Ma'wali, Director General of Nationality and Elections, Ministry of Interior
- Zakiyah bint Hamdan bin Rashid al Farsi; Advisor to the Minister of Social Affairs on women's and children's issues
- Shaikh Sultan bin Mattar bin Slaim al 'Azizi; Director of Legal

Department, Ministry of Justice

- Salih bin 'Ayil bin Khamis al 'Amri; Advisor to the Minister of Manpower (MoM)
- Fahd bin Ahmad bin Hamad al Jabri, Director of Training and Recruitment, Ministry of Civil Service

13. (C) The group represents a range of civil society, government, and labor groups; three of the 14 members are women. Six members are from government ministries, six are from the private sector and two are from the Majlis Oman. Dr. Rasheed al Haribi is the brother of former Embassy LES Khalid al Haribi (ref B) who runs Tawasul, Oman's first think-tank and an organization dedicated to promoting civil society. Dr. Rasheed is the honorary chairman of Tawasul and actively supports its endeavors. Saoud al Jabri has worked extensively with the International Labor Organization and the Solidarity Center under MEPI-funded grants to increase the capacity of Oman's nascent labor unions. Dr. Rashid al Bulushi is a strong partner in the Embassy's rule of law efforts and the recipient of a local MEPI grant to create a labor law bench book for judges. He currently has two additional local grant proposals submitted. Salih al Amri is one of the most supportive and knowledgeable of the Embassy's contacts at the MoM on labor and TIP issues. Shaikh Sultan Al 'Azizi is a 1999 International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) alumnus, having attended a program on U.S. Judicial Systems.

14. (C) In a conversation with poloff on January 25, Saoud al Jabri was visibly delighted to have been chosen for the HRC. Although personally pleased, he was even more encouraged about the message sent to workers in Oman with the selection of a union leader, a MoM official, and an employer saying that, "this enshrines the tripartite process in the main human rights group."

15. (C) On January 30, the Dutch Embassy hosted a public lecture by Ambassador at Large for Human Rights Arjan Hamburger. The event was attended by about 40 individuals, 75% of whom were Omani. During the question and answer period after the lecture, Tabia al Mawali, a noted local human rights activist, criticized the

selection of the HRC, noting that both the chairman and deputy chairman have military backgrounds and that there are no political activists from civil society included - that it was strictly a "government commission." (Note: The Omani military is viewed by some as one of the most progressive elements of society and has no record of human rights violations. End Note.) She opined that she shared the view prevalent in Omani chat rooms and blogs that not much is expected from the HRC.

16. (C) Dr. Rasheed Al Haribi discussed the HRC at length with poloff on January 30 after the conclusion of the human rights event. He was excited to have been chosen for the commission, while acknowledging the large task ahead. He noted that one of the responsibilities of the HRC is to respond to international reports regarding human rights in Oman and sought information on the U.S. Human Rights Report. He was concerned that the criticism of the HRC before it had even met was not "giving them a chance," and clarified that the chairman and deputy had not been selected for their military experience, but in their current roles at the Majlis and the MFA. He predicted that meeting location and office space would be an immediate issue as it would be more cost effective to meet at the Majlis al-Dawla, but that would lessen the group's independence. He was very interested in continuing to dialogue with the Embassy on these issues.

17. (C) The HRC met for the first time on January 31 and there was limited media coverage of the gathering; however, it noted that one of the topics on the agenda was the formation of working groups. Khalid al Haribi contacted poloff on January 31 seeking input on the organizational structure for the working groups, revealing that his brother, HRC member Rasheed al Haribi, had sought his assistance on the matter. In a meeting on February 1, Khalid al Haribi worked with poloff to define four working groups along with proposed members for each group. He noted that the HRC deliberately chose "working group" vs. "sub-committee" in order to focus on getting things done. He said the commission had agreed to meet again next Sunday night and joked that "it is definitely not a

government body if they are actually going to meet at night!" (Note: The HRC is only required by law to meet four times a year; an immediate second meeting is thus itself an encouraging sign. End Note.)

18. (C) When asked about the absence of anyone on the HRC who could address religious freedom issues, Al Haribi speculated that this was a deliberate choice by the Sultan to emphasize the division between religion and civil affairs. He opined that if a religious figure were involved in the HRC, that individual would merely have to say "the Quran says..." to shut down discussion on any topic.

19. (C) COMMENT: A healthy cynicism about the immediate impact of this group and its independence is likely warranted. However, many of the negative comments currently circulating are either unfounded or uninformed and do not seem to take into account the strong credentials of many of the commission members. This group represents a well-qualified collection of Omanis who are leaders in moving forward a liberal agenda for human rights in Oman. They are not ministers or extremely high ranking officials, but rather a group of a younger generation of Omanis who should be able to provide leadership into the future. END COMMENT.
Schmierer